

If They Back a Pair of Twos, They Must Have CIA Money

By Art Buchwald

Carl Bernstein's revelation that 400 members of the press were also working, in some way, for the CIA overseas in the 1950s and 1960s had made every newspaperman who was stationed abroad suspect.

I worked in Paris for 14 years for the international edition of The Herald Tribune and, ever since the story broke, even I have been asked if I was involved in any overt or covert operations concerning our most famous secret service.

The answer is, "Not to my knowledge." I'm fairly sure of it because the salary The Paris Herald Tribune gave me was way below the prevailing CIA rates for reporters, and I have to believe the chintzy Herald Tribune management was paying me out of its own pocket.

I should have had some suspicions, even in those days, that several of my colleagues were working for somebody beside the papers they pretended to be accredited to.

One American friend was living in an 18-room villa in Vienna, with three servants and a chauffeur. I never could understand it, because the only paper he was working for, at the time, was a weekly magazine published in Terre Haute, Ind.

I once asked him about his elegant lifestyle, and he replied, "The Terre

Haute Publisher believes its overseas bureau chiefs should live well."

I should have smelled something fishy when he once asked me to take an article he had written back to Paris and hide it in a tree near the American embassy.

"Is that how you file your stories," I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "It's much faster

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than sending them over the teletype."

"But the article is on microfilm," I said.

He got angry. "Look, you file your stories the way you want to, but don't tell me how to file mine."

Possibly one of the reasons the CIA never sought to recruit me is that they may have thought I would not make a very good agent.

I recall going to Carlsbad in Czechoslovakia for a film festival in the 1950s. When I returned, I had a visit in my office from two very well dressed men who said they were from the Dulles Broadcasting Company in Waco, Tex. They told me they were unable to attend the film festival and asked if I would brief them on it.

I said, "Certainly, what do you want to know?"

"How many anti-aircraft guns did you see around the festival hall?"

"None that I can remember," I said. "There were searchlights at the film festival, but there always are."

"Were there any land mines near your hotel," the other one asked.

"Beats me," I said. "I didn't see any one step on one."

"How many Soviet divisions did you see?"

"You mean in the films?"

"No, you dummy. Real Soviet divisions with armor."

"Hey, what's that got to do with the film festival," I asked.

"It's hopeless, Joe," one of them said as he got up.

The other one got up, too. "I told the company we'd be wasting our time." And they stomped out.

Had it occurred to me I was being tested, I certainly would have been more cooperative. But in those days I really believed there was a Dulles Broadcasting Company in Waco, Tex. Heaven knows I could have used the extra CIA money.

I don't know which of my fellow correspondents worked for the CIA and which didn't. But in the late '40s and '50s I played a lot of poker with them. And I now suspect several of them were more than they said they were. How do I know? Well, some of them used to stay in the hand to the very end, with a pair of twos. It dawned on me just the other day that only a guy on a CIA payroll could afford to do that.

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